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TRIP

Four Democratic congressmen went to Central America Friday for talks with government officials about the reported expansion of the U.S.-backed guerrilla war against Nicaragua.

Reps. George Miller and Don Edwards of California, Mike Lowry of Washington, and Les AuCoin of Oregon will return Monday in time for House sessions next week on Central America.

The House will vote on legislation that would bar covert military operations against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

"The recent disclosure that the CIA plans to double the size of its 'covert' secret army in Central America is a serious expansion of U.S. activity in that area," Miller said, referring to news reports about the growth of the U.S.-backed guerrilla force fighting the leftist Nicaraguan regime.

The Washington Post said Thursday the CIA is planning to support a 12,000 to 15,000-man guerrilla force, about double the size of the "secret army" backed by the United States two months ago.

"Our goal is to discuss these reports and other crucial foreign policy and military questions with key people in Nicaragua and El Salvador."

Miller said there is "a great deal of concern in Congress that the CIA and the Reagan administration are expanding the role of the United States in Central America and that we are risking deeper involvement that could lead to the commitment of U.S. troops.

"I believe it is crucial, as we begin our debate on the future of that policy, that the Congress have direct communication with the key people in Central America."